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I Rebel—Therefore We Exist: Emotional Standardization in Organizations and the Emotionally Intelligent Individual

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Abstract

In this analysis, I associate the commodification of emotions at work with an increasingly imposed standardization as far as emotional displays are concerned. I refer to this process as a form of *emotional convergence* operating within organizations. I contrast this tendency with another buoyant construct in organizational behavior and psychology studies: Emotional Intelligence (EI). Individual emotional and intellectual evolution lies at the heart of the ability EI model, which I interpret as a form of *emotional divergence* that individuals harness in managing their daily lives. Hitherto, scholars have largely ignored the potential conflict between both research strands, especially the possibility of high EI individuals as non-conforming actors in the organizational arena. The latter leads me to propose an interaction model between individual behavior and organizational norms. Implications for theory and suggestions for future research are detailed.

Keywords

emotional intelligence, deviance, commodification of emotions, nonconformist behavior

Introduction

Toynbee's (1951) observation that disintegrating civilizations are consistently characterized by a high degree of standardization and uniformity is a provocative one in an era where organizational standards and norms are ubiquitous (Brunsson & Jacobsson, 2000). From an organizational perspective, several scholars subscribe to a similar view, expressing concern over excessively homogenized and standardized organizations and the ramifications thereof (Hodgson & Cicmil, 2007; Jones, Levesque, & Masuda, 2003). In consequence, although this analysis is not aimed at the level of entire civilizations, I suggest that a similar phenomenon can operate within organizations as well.

One contemporary manifestation of the widespread existence of standards and norms in organizations pertains to the commodification of emotions at work. This phenomenon has been studied intensely in recent years (Fineman, 2000; Lindebaum, 2009). Here, emotional exchanges are appropriated and shaped by the organization to serve its interests; they are turned into manageable and exchangeable resources that can be traded, like any other currency or commodity, with a view to make it gain from the exchange (Bolton & Boyd, 2003). Such a view may be particularly pertinent in light of the increasing number of individuals working in the service industry (Ashkanasy, Härtel, & Daus, 2002), where the ability to convey pleasant emotions is of paramount importance on economic grounds (e.g., Illouz, 2007). Thus,

it is often suggested that survival in service organizations is considerably dependent on the successful presentation of emotional displays expected by clients and customers (Wasserman, Rafaeli, & Kluger, 2000). Yet, these expectations may pose difficulties for individuals. Schor (2006) goes as far as to suggest that, because jobs are increasingly scarce, "the norms for succeeding in them are harder and harder to sustain for individuals" (p. 46).

Like several authors before (Illouz, 2007; Mestrovic, 1999), I argue that the expression of emotions is increasingly cast into a simplified mold, reflecting the restricted range of those emotions whose display is desired by the organization. Empirical evidence to this effect is accumulating (Kunda & van Maanen, 1999; Martin, Knopoff, & Beckman, 2000). In fact, Fineman (2001) goes as far as to describe the scale of this organizational intervention as "grand" (p. 234). I view this development of *emotional convergence* with considerable concern due to its infringement on individual identity and well-being, let alone the loss of individual discretion and autonomy. Indeed, social norms serve crucial purposes in facilitating human interaction (Forgas, 1985), but there is a

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tipping point where they may also turn dysfunctional. That is, there may be a curvilinear effect in the relationship between individual interests and social norms. Therefore, I do not suggest that simply asking service workers to be polite and helpful actually damages them emotionally in the short run. What is critical to the argument is a pronounced need to display organizationally prescribed emotions over a long period of time. Differentiating between health outcomes in the short and long run has received scholarly attention of late (Lawrence, Troth, Jordan, & Collins, 2011).

Curiously, scholars have also zealously examined the construct of emotional intelligence (EI), in terms of its implications for organizational outcomes, such as performance (Cartwright & Pappas, 2008), and individual well-being (Lindebaum, 2009). Mayer and Salovey (1997) define EI as the “ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions *to promote emotional and intellectual growth*” (p. 10, italics added for emphasis). More recently, they explicitly denoted EI as a human ability (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008). Seeing that emotions are engagements with the world (Solomon, 1993) that provide crucial action readiness to safeguard the survival of individuals (Darwin, 1872/1999), I take the reference to emotional and intellectual growth in the above definition to imply an *emotional divergence* that individuals harness in managing their daily lives. This divergent notion appears plausible given that the EI construct significantly advanced on the critique that the “mass suppression of emotion throughout the civilized world has stifled our growth emotionally” (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000, p. 396). In turn, being emotionally intelligent implies not only that one can draw on a wide range of emotions to help individuals engender multiple alternatives to one and the same problem (George, 2000), but also that one possesses the adaptive ability to manage negative emotions and cognitions successfully. Such ability has been linked to better health outcomes (Salovey, Bedell, Detweiler, & Mayer, 1999). Under this formulation, the presence of emotions is acknowledged as the crucial telltale signs they are; they convey meaning about relationships (Schwarz & Clore, 1983).

Although the notions of emotional convergence (as represented by the phenomenon of commodified emotions) and divergence (as represented by EI) have not been explicitly and jointly discussed in the literature, it is the first aim of this analysis to graphically draw out the tension between these strands. Specifically, this entails that EI scholars should heed this tension more carefully in their attempts to advance theory as well as design and test empirical studies. However, I should explicitly point out that there is some definitional ambiguity in the reference to emotional and intellectual growth, as the definition does not clarify whether it concerns

growth in socially sanctioned terms or intrapersonal growth. In a similar vein, although nonconformity may have several roots (e.g., value incongruence) in a world of increasing complexity, I suggest that EI can influence the emergence of it when emotions are considered the very valuable resources through which organizational ends are achieved (Fineman, 2000; Illouz, 2007). This may be due to EI representing an individual’s capacity to process emotional data (Mayer et al., 2008).

This study can be located alongside a significant corpus of research that scrutinizes the study of organizational culture as a guise for “colonizing” individual emotions (see Gabriel, 1999a; Willmott, 1993). For instance, Willmott (1993) evaluates research on organizational culture. He draws attention to how it is engineered to promote employee commitment to a “monolithic structure of feeling and thought” (p. 517) as a tool of normative control. A related phenomenon in the context of organizational cultures that seek to manipulate individual emotions stems from Fineman’s (2000) work concerning the commodification of emotions, although his work is considerably more attuned to emotions per se as a resource that possesses exchange value. Note, however, that commodified emotions and normative control are two distinct phenomena. The former constitutes an external influence force (i.e., emotions possess a market and exchange value). It is a control mechanism inherent in the labor process. Normative control, by contrast, is an internal control mechanism, defined as “the attempt to elicit and direct the required efforts of member by controlling the underlying experiences, thoughts, and feelings that guide their actions” (Kunda, 1992, pp. 11-12). Despite their different nature, both phenomena have in common that they imply a manipulation of individual emotions for the benefit of the organization.

As a whole, the commonality of these studies is such that they provide accounts for, and highlight ramifications of, the commodification of emotions at work. Whereas these studies contain the occasional reference to individual resistance, they do not specify in detail the underlying processes that foster it. Drawing on the construct of EI enables the specification of *rationales* and *contingencies* that potentially contribute to this resistance, as manifest in the emergence of nonconforming organizational actors. Some scholars, recently, have drawn attention to this possibility, noting that

since emotions penetrate individual cognitive processes and social relationships . . . , it seems plausible to us to suggest that . . . power relations [and] resistance tendencies to emotional control within organisations . . . all constitute intriguing variables [in the study of EI in organizations]. (Lindebaum & Cartwright, 2011, p. 286)

Thus, I propose that EI may help explain why individuals sometimes resist organizational demands for emotional conformity (Bolton & Boyd, 2003; Wray-Bliss, 2001). Therefore, the second contribution of this analysis rests with these rationales and contingencies leading to nonconforming behavior. For the sake of clarity and consistency, I refer to the commodification of emotions in the remainder of this article to denote the standardized outcomes of organizational cultures.

The third contribution flows from the specification of the aforementioned rationales and contingencies. Specifically, it enables the exploration of strategies emotionally intelligent individuals potentially embark on the moment they feel and realize the impact of organizational endeavors to commodify emotions. Far from using crude and transparent practices, organizations seeking to commodify emotions or influence behavior often harness more subtle approaches to accomplish it (Fleming & Sturdy, 2011). Of note, I do not suggest that this is likely to occur over a short period of time, but is rather accumulating in the long run. Also, I do not suggest that this happens across occupations, but rather in those that have strict role prescriptions, such as service workers or project managers in construction (Hochschild, 1983; Lindebaum & Fielden, 2011).

In addressing these gaps in the literature, this analysis constitutes a significant contribution to theory development. As such, I hope it instigates more finely grained debates in the field and serves organizational behavior scholars and psychologists as a potent springboard for future empirical testing.

The article unfolds alongside the following main sections. First, I briefly discuss organizational standards and norms, highlighting their differences and commonalities. Second, I extend their implications to the realm of commodified emotions at work. Third, I appraise the construct EI and its implications for organizations and individuals. Fourth, I draw on a small number of empirical studies to outline why I deem high EI individuals as potential organizational nonconformists. Note, however, that a speculative hint remains because only now theoretical and empirical research emerges that examines EI as a catalyst for nonconformity or resistance (e.g., Fambrough & Hart, 2008; Winkel, Wyland, Shaffer, & Clason, 2011). In the discussion, I synthesize the article in the form of two conflicting templates and one testable diagram. Together, they highlight the interaction between the individual and organizations.

Organizational Standards and Norms

Standards and norms, though sometimes used interchangeably, can have rather distinct connotations. Typically, standards are described as inherently inert and multidimensional, as “a set of agreed-upon rules for the production of (textual

or material) objects,” spanning “more than one community of practise . . . deployed in making things work together over distance and heterogeneous metrics” (Bowker & Starr, 1999, pp. 13-14). Thus, they typically intend to make actions comparable over time and space and can readily be combined with other resources. One such resource pertains to the emotions of individuals, which are appreciably appropriated and commodified in contemporary organizations.

Social norms, in contrast, which used to be rarely found in written form (Gabriel, 1999b), are often defined as generalized expectations about behaviors that are internalized in the course of socialization (Coleman, 1990). Though multifaceted, norms have a pronounced behavioral dimension and are subject to, and influenced by, the social milieu in which they are negotiated, such as the dress code of employees in organizations. Also, social norms are plastic and susceptible to change, and that is particularly so with regard to emotions (Stearns & Stearns, 1985). As Clarke and Fineman (2009) discuss, these social norms also impinge on individual behavior within organizations (i.e., How does the moral fabric of society affect the behavior of the manager?).

Brunsson and Jacobsson (2000) note that standards and norms can be further differentiated by virtue of the explicit and evident sources of the former, which are difficult to pinpoint for the latter. The implicit nature of norms is, *inter alia*, reflected in how individuals are socialized into the culture of an organization (e.g., inviting new employees to join the after-work drinks ritual). However, some scholars suggest that norms can also be rather explicit in nature, as reflected in recruitment strategies and job descriptions (Ashkanasy & Daus, 2002). Recent examples include the fast-food chain McDonalds (see <http://www.mcdonalds.co.uk/people/join-the-team/join-the-team.shtml>—Retrieved 15 August 2011). Similarly, Fineman (2001) provides a vivid example of what kind of emotional display is expected by McDonalds' employees, reciting a conversation between a young male assistant manager and a female employee. Furthermore, the *Times Higher Education* magazine recently reported the case of Leeds University (United Kingdom), where guidelines were issued exhorting members of staff to write with more wit. The paper also referred to a set of personality traits to “guide how we talk and write for the university,” including being straightforward, friendly, imaginative, and confident. More to the point, it states that “life—yours, your reader's and the university's—will be a lot richer for it” (Newman, 2010, p. 7). The above examples underpin that, irrespective of their explicit or implicit nature, standards and norms are instruments of control within organizations (Brunsson & Jacobsson, 2000).

In practical terms, the indoctrinal momentum of some organizational norms can be so immense that individuals readily experience shame, anxiety, or guilt when they are violated (van Maanen, 1999). These socially constructed

emotions have a tight grip on the behavioral repertoire individuals draw from and are often central to social control in organizations and societies (Scheff, 1997). Thus, despite their occasional heterogeneous character and distinct terminology, standards and norms can be identical in their implications for organizations and individuals.

Commodified Emotions

One manifestation of these implications can be traced to the study of emotions in organizations. This topic has been intensely studied as the normalizing mechanism to secure control over, and compliance with, organizational processes (Barsade & Gibson, 2007; Caruso & Salovey, 2004). Some organizations actively foster an atmosphere where employees share affective behavioral cues, so as to sustain a common emotional style (Kelly & Barsade, 2001). For instance, individuals may perform better when they are committed to collective goals whose ideals they honor. Not surprisingly, Bolton and Boyd (2003) note that this shaping and manipulating of employees' emotions is firmly tied to the notion of competitive advantage. In line with this view, several studies suggest that control over individuals can best be exercised by shaping their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Barley & Kunda, 1992). Krishnamurti (1992) underlines these findings elegantly, arguing that many organizations are "after the mind of man—*after* in the sense of wanting to capture it, shape it to a certain pattern" (p. 32, italics in original). Such intentionality may be more distinct and explicit in some organizations compared with others. Yet, some commentators discern an increasing intentionality on the part of organizations (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

One prominent control mechanism inherent in the labor process is referred to as the commodification of emotions (e.g., Fineman, 2000). That is, emotions are converted into manageable and exchangeable resources or "things," capable of being monitored and manipulated according to the dictates of the market (Boden & Williams, 2002), as is known in the context of emotional labor. Hochschild (1983) defines it as "the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" such that "emotional labor is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value" (p. 7). Here, it is imperative for individuals to display, and sometimes really feel, specific emotions in exchange for remuneration. Failure to align displayed and felt emotions may lead to emotional dissonance, which refers to the structural discrepancy between the two (Heuven & Bakker, 2003).

Seen in this light, I argue that there is a growing trend in organizations to demand *in writing* specific behavioral episodes that feature specific emotional displays by employees, as the examples above underline. Oftentimes, so-called corporate culture handbooks serve as transmitters to get the message across to employees (Kunda, 1992). Thus, a climate

of emotional standardization is instilled, where emotions considered inappropriate by the organization are suppressed by individuals, thereby often leading to emotional exhaustion and burnout (Kruml & Geddes, 2000; Tracy, 2000). The underlying process may range from exerting peer pressure to instilling fear of losing one's job if the role prescriptions are violated (Fineman & Sturdy, 1999). Although this may not necessarily initiate the wholesale demise of organizations, absence from work due to ill health (e.g., stress and burnout) as well as high turnover clearly have a negative impact on organizations in the long run (Ashkanasy & Cooper, 2008; Kumar Mishra & Bhatnagar, 2010; Lawrence, 2008). In contrast, emotions deemed appropriate are cast into a limited and simplified mold, reflecting the emotional and behavioral standards desired by organizations (Bolton, 2009). Under this formulation, the view that the suppression of emotions is a voluntary act, occurring when individuals choose not to act on certain stimuli (Beckett, 2002), may not hold. This, in turn, can lead to a loss of individual autonomy and discretion, as well as the freedom of how to feel, yielding a workforce pool of seemingly indistinguishable individuals (see appendix). The result may well be in congruence with what the Social Identity Theory (Hogg & Terry, 2001) characterizes as "depersonalization." The principal consequence thereof is such that individuals succumb their own self or identity to a group social categorization, the result often being that they feel depersonalized from their own values (Jones et al., 2003). Note, however, that there may be instances where individuals do not resist such endeavors, simply because they are willing to express their emotions within organizationally appropriate ranges that they deem fit as well (Schneider, 1987). Fleming and Sturdy (2009) examine such willingness in the context of neonormative control studies and suggested that management now frequently exhorts individuals "just to be yourself" or to "have fun at work." Underlying these maxims are appeals to feeling existentially empowered by exposing oneself, especially one's personality and preferences, to the organization. From this point of view, an individual's emotions are important, but only as long as they serve organizational goals (Fineman, 1997). However, several commentators concur that this also constitutes a form of control, one that raises questions about the meaning of authenticity at work (e.g., Fleming & Sturdy, 2009).

For the purpose of this analysis, however, I suggest that not to have the choice of how to *feel* as we are naturally inclined to implies that we cannot *be* who we naturally are. Durkheim (1915) lucidly expounds this point, noting that

mourning is not a natural movement of private feelings wounded by a cruel loss; it is a duty imposed by the group. One weeps, not simply because he is sad, but because he is forced to weep. It is a ritual attitude

he is forced to adopt out of respect from custom, but which is, in a large measure, independent of his affective state. (p. 397)

Camus's (1982) *The Outsider* starkly depicts how society retaliates if one does not mourn about the loss of a loved one. The character in Camus's novel refuses to lie about his true feelings (i.e., he does not experience regret after his mother dies to the extent others consider it "normal"). Thus, he remains true to himself, albeit he perishes as a result of it. These examples underscore the intimate link between being forced to comply with social expectations, and the repercussions for how one might, and is allowed to, feel. In other words, the notion of emotional convergence can be considered as a sophisticated incursion into individual identity, as emotions are central to the formation thereof (Damasio, 2000). I elaborate this point in a later section of this article. Interestingly, while organizations may be adamant in demanding the adoption of certain core values (i.e., "to feel great") and the corresponding display of organization-friendly emotions, it is often an open question whether they assist individuals to cope with these demands.

The notion of emotional standardization, beyond the tipping point where they can turn dysfunctional, in many contemporary organizations is difficult to reconcile with the human potential to evolve (Krishnamurti & Anderson, 1991; Rogers, 1977). It, too, is a sharp reminder of Toynbee's (1951) hortatory observation that standardization tends to instigate the decline of social groups as opposed to the growth thereof. Sale (1980) concurs, contending that "diversity is the rule of human life, not simplicity: the human animal has succeeded because it has been able to diversify, not specialise" (p. 403). In this respect, we should be reminded that emotions did not lead to our demise. Quite the reverse, emotions are the product of our evolution; they are crucial action tendencies to ensure the survival of individuals (Darwin, 1872/1999).

EI

Combining the increasing convergence between organizational standards and norms as a result of commodified emotions at work opens up an intriguing new vista for scholars in organizational behavior and psychology, especially through the lens of EI. In this article, I draw on the ability model of EI, as defined prior. The ability model explicitly centers on a set of emotional abilities assessed via tests of maximum performance representing an individual's ability to process emotion-laden information (Mayer & Salovey, 1997) that are partly determined by basic information processes in the brain (Reis et al., 2007). As I am interested in the emotional and intellectual growth of individuals, the choice of ability EI as a framework of analysis is self-explanatory. I construe the maximum performance in processing emotion-laden

information in the spirit of Krishnamurti's (1992) notion of *seriousness*, which he conceives as the courage to pursue thoughts to the very end, irrespective of the (perhaps painful) consequences that such inquiring may lead to. Because emotions are data about us, the pursuit of a thought to the very end can be a vehicle to foster the aforementioned emotional divergence.

Briefly, the ability model of EI implicates four branches, which are hierarchically ordered. First, the *perception of emotions* pertains to perceiving emotion in the self and others, using cues derived from facial expressions, voices, or bodily movements (Caruso & Salovey, 2004). Second, individuals can *use emotions to facilitate thought*. That is, positive moods can enhance creativity, integrative thinking, and inductive reasoning, whereas negative moods impel one toward attention to detail, exposure of errors and problems, as well as thorough information processing (George, 2000). Third, EI involves the capacity to *understand emotions*. That is, the causes and consequences of emotions, how they change over time, and how to put all this into language (Caruso & Salovey, 2004). Last, EI also implies the efficient *regulation of emotions* in the self and others in emotionally and socially challenging situations (Wranik, Feldman-Barrett, & Salovey, 2006).

In recent years, a groundswell of scientific interest revolved around the concept of EI (Côté & Miners, 2006; Lindebaum, 2009). EI has been depicted as a vital ingredient for functioning interpersonal relationships (Caruso & Salovey, 2004), and those high in EI are said to be better able to handle social relationships (Lopes et al., 2004). There is also evidence to suggest that EI has positive implications for individual performance at work (Côté & Miners, 2006). Thus, many writers are quick to pinpoint that the business case for EI is "compelling" (Goleman, 1998). By now, a mushrooming "EI training" industry has evolved to help organizations tap into this supposedly indispensable construct (Kunnanatt, 2004).

Unfortunately, many proponents of the EI concept, in the pop psychology as well as in the scientific camp, have overlooked one crucially important possibility; individuals high in EI may act against, or seek to defend themselves from, the standardizing or normalizing of emotions at work. The possibility of such conflict, and the manifestation of high EI individuals as nonconformists, has been an enduring blind spot in the extant literature, and scholars have rarely attended to this problem. More to the point, Hughes (2005) appears to be one of the very few writers who explicitly states that EI may also "open up new possibilities for resistant worker agency since . . . EI at once combines greater emotional regulation with greater discretion over the display and management of emotions" (p. 619). Underlying this possibility may be the realization that continuous exposure to these constraints, no matter how subtle they might be, has detrimental implications for their health and integrity, such as depersonalization,

burnout, and exhaustion (Foster & Hoggett, 1999; Hochschild, 1983; Tracy, 2000). Such constraints are also at variance with the adaptive characteristic of emotions (Keltner & Haidt, 1999). Interestingly, although one might suggest that high EI individuals may choose to conform to organizational norms to safeguard their well-being (e.g., for financial reasons), the notion of emotional convergence ultimately may entail negative consequences for their well-being. For instance, following Krishnamurti's (1992) notion of seriousness, an individual may realize that, even though nonconformity may lead to group exclusion (e.g., because one does not join the obligatory after-work drinks), it nevertheless has enormous benefits for the individual's well-being. Crucially, EI has been shown to consistently predict positive health outcomes (Martins, Ramalho, & Morin, 2010). As such, my interest rests with the possibility of high EI individuals as nonconformists. This interest builds on theoretical (Fambrough & Hart, 2008; Lindebaum, 2009) and empirical studies linking EI to deviant behaviors. For instance, studies suggest that ability EI is positively related to individually and organizationally focused deviant behaviors (Winkel et al., 2011). Thus, although some conjecture resides in my argument, there is an emerging body of research that associates EI with negative consequences for organizations. Like other scholars (see Bakan, 1969; Popper, 2004), I feel thus encouraged to pursue possibility and conjecture (i.e., Can it work?) over proof and prediction (i.e., Is it true?). Below, I detail several rationales why an emotionally intelligent individual potentially falls into the nonconformist category.

Emotionally Intelligent Individuals as Nonconformists

In extending prior research associating deviant behavior with EI (Winkel et al., 2011), I propose that there are at least four potent rationales why an emotionally intelligent individual potentially engages in nonconformist behavior. First, as suggested earlier, emotions are key to the formation of individual identity and function in two important ways as the "glue" for it. For one thing, they attract the self to new experiences due to the seeking out and recognizing of familiar or meaningful signatures. For another, they link disparate experiences that share emotional information, instilling meaning and value to individual experiences (Haviland-Jones & Kahlbaugh, 2000). Prolonged exposure to, or involvement with, organizational environments that require employees to "genuinely feel" happy, fine, upbeat, and positive about the service or product may render it difficult for them to switch off these corporate mantras at the end of the working day (Fineman, 2001). In this respect, Bolton (2009) reads Hochschild's work on emotional labor as essentially concerning a struggle over identity. Thus, the internalized work role is making inroads into the privacy of employees,

constituting a sophisticated form of ontological control (Steiner, 2001). In other words, they sacrifice a part of their selves for the wealth of another entity, which fits closely with Durkheim's (1897/1952) conception of alienation. A recent study that examined emotional dissonance and burnout in a sample of flight attendances underscores this argument. One respondent, rather poignantly, lamented that at work "one is very much managed on being cheerful, being sociable, being kind and smiling" and that he or she "had the feeling of not controlling [his/her] own character any longer . . . I had the feeling that I had lost my own feelings" (Heuven & Bakker, 2003, p. 93).

Second, empirical studies show that not being able to freely express one's own emotions is associated with negative physiological costs, such as increased blood pressure and heart rate (Butler et al., 2003). Being unable to express truly felt emotions can be a direct result of commodified emotions, which oftentimes serves as a control mechanism to secure compliance with organizational interests, as mentioned earlier. Yet, this control is also a double-edged sword if it is enforced by a stringent regime of order, leaving individuals with the compulsion to comply. The result is often that individuals experience tensions, anxiety, and nervousness (Wieland-Burston, 1992). Lawrence (2008) adds that the suppression of intense negative emotions is accountable for inducing toxic events in individuals, such as depression and low life satisfaction and well-being. After all, we may successfully suppress emotions, but that does not alleviate the subjective experience thereof. Lawrence's observation appears particularly suitable for extension into the study of emotional labor, especially the aspect of emotional dissonance. Several empirical studies document a consistent association between emotional dissonance and psychological strain (Zapf, 2002). Crucially, accumulating these physiological and psychological costs over time appears incongruent with EI theory, for the simple reason that it would compromise the individual's well-being and integrity (Lindebaum, 2009). Note that meta-analytic evidence consistently links EI to positive health outcomes (Martins et al., 2010).

Third, there are also costs accruing in terms of quality of interpersonal relationships at work. When we suppress emotions, we fail to send the right signals about us, thus rendering it difficult for others to meet our true needs (Caruso & Salovey, 2004). Not surprisingly, then, the suppression of emotions has been consistently linked to inhibitions in forming relationships and rapport with others (see Butler & Gross, 2009, for a review). Particularly at work, performance is often contingent on the support, advice, and access to resources provided by others (Kelley & Caplan, 1993). In consequence, the quality of social interactions plays a decisive role in determining whether one can draw on such a supportive network at work. Of note, Butler and Gross (2009) summarize the emotion regulation literature by suggesting that

the suppression of emotions has implications on an individual level (e.g., psychological strain) and social level (i.e., inhibition in forming relationships), thus linking the second and third rationale discussed above.

Fourth, emotions embrace a vital function in supporting memory (Bechara, Damasio, & Damasio, 2000). When emotions are suppressed, individuals tend to end up remembering less information by virtue of the consumptive nature of self-regulatory activities (Baumeister, Muraven, & Tice, 2000). In consequence, an individual's heuristic ability to draw on a wider range of emotional experience to engender the best course of action is greatly impaired.

Taken together, I suggest that these rationales provide a plausible impetus for individuals high in EI to attempt safeguarding their identity, well-being, and integrity in emotionally commodifying organizations. Conceivably, they may do so in a deterministic fashion, for they are more likely to have accurate insights into their true needs (i.e., perception of emotion), enabling them to arrive at decisions that are in *their* best interest—as opposed to group interests. Damasio (2000) elegantly captures the interplay between individual and social influences, suggesting that,

Notwithstanding the reality that learning and culture alter the expression of emotions, . . . emotions are biologically determined processes, depending on innately set brain devices, laid down by a long evolutionary history. (p. 51)

Contrasting Parkinson's (1996) work (i.e., "Emotions are social") and Seneca's thoughts explicates this point. The former suggests that social relationships, including issues of social conformity, are the most common cause of emotions, whereas the latter argues that the "cause of our emotion is beyond our power, but whether a cause affects us is not" (in Solomon, 2003, p. 233). Seneca's thoughts are especially pertinent in light of this study's focus on EI and nonconformity in organizations because the accurate perception of emotion in the self and others, as well as the adaptive regulation of emotions, are key components of EI theory. One may not be immune to the cause of emotions, but being emotionally intelligent can imply that one may not act on it. So the outcome is likely to be an emotionally mindful and adept individual, as opposed to individuals who are emotionally inept as a result of commodified emotions (Bolton & Boyd, 2003).

In the wider context of organizational behavior studies, my assumption of high EI individuals as nonconformists fits closely with Schein's (1968) classical work on socialization processes in organizations. He proposes that individuals may engage in one of three distinctive behavioral responses to these processes. They may either (a) conform to it (i.e., acceptance of organization's culture and norms), (b) rebel

against it (i.e., rejection of organization's culture and norms), or (c) engage in creative individualism (i.e., acceptance or rejection of organization's culture and norms in a selective fashion, adapting it to his or her characteristics). Following from the above, it appears sensible to propose that individuals high in EI are rather unlikely to conform to these norms. Whether they simply reject these norms and engage in non-conformist behavior or perhaps opt for creative individualism seems to depend on the presence of two contingencies: (a) their perception of alternatives and (b) their goals, both of which influence the resultant choices they perform.

Studies in the domain of negotiations underpin the former point. For instance, individuals' perception of their choices and alternatives considerably affects concession making. The better the perceived alternatives, the lower the dependence on the counterpart, and the lower the concessions rendered (Sinaceur & Tiedens, 2006). In actual fact, individuals' perception of their alternatives may impinge on their behavior more strongly than any other type of information (White, Valley, Bazerman, Neale, & Peck, 1994). By extension, high EI individuals, in understanding the negative consequences of commodified emotions on them, may perceive that their well-being and psychological health are sacrosanct and that there are alternatives to the current organization they work for. To the extent they perceive these behavioral alternatives within their job prescriptions, they may engage in creative individualism. Failing that, they may seek employment elsewhere. Thus, it is conceivable that absenteeism and turnover may be a proxy index of organizational decline impelled by those individuals who turn their backs to organizations they perceive to be emotionally commodifying. It shall be understood, however, that this argumentation must be interpreted with the current economic climate in mind, where unemployment is rising (National Office of Statistics, 2009).

The second intrinsic factor as to whether individuals leave or stay on the job concerns the goals they pursue. Lindebaum (2009), for instance, argues that EI individuals are more likely to center on their well-being in conjunction with intrinsically rewarding occupations (e.g., musicians, gardeners, care assistants—see Rose, 2003) rather than being driven by extrinsic motivation, which tends to engender an environment of compliance and defiance (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). By the same token, Kasser and Ryan (1993) note that well-being was most distinct for individuals who embraced intrinsically orientated goals, such as personal growth or community contributions. Of note, scholars identified a decline in worker satisfaction with the intrinsic domains of their work (Green, 2011), as well as in the exercise of discretion and autonomy as part of one's job (Green & Tsitsianis, 2005).

The aforementioned arguments permit to outline the characteristics of an emotionally intelligent individual within an organizational context. Rather than mere acceptance of being subject to the commodification of emotions at work (i.e.,

social pressures), I conceive of emotionally intelligent individuals as those characters who are more likely to seek intrinsically rewarding jobs embedded in organizational environments that are relatively low in emotional commodification. They may also have awareness of the choices available to them, so as to orchestrate alternatives should external conformity pressures increase and become unfavorable to their well-being and integrity over a long period of time. To a certain degree, this may implicate that they engage in creative individualism. Crucially, I do not suggest that these individuals are lone operators. Instead, within their creative individualism, they may derive some satisfaction from the interaction with others at work. Yet, concurrently, individuals high in EI are also more likely to perceive the tipping where this is no longer feasible, thus converting into nonconformists and leaving the organization in quest of alternatives. Even a small number of individuals would suffice to falsify the null hypothesis that high individual EI does *not* play any role in the emergence of resistant behaviors, thus running counter to the all-pervasive maxim that high individual EI is synonymous with positive outcomes for the organization.

Discussion

In this article, I sought to challenge and expand existing theory concerning the commodification of emotions and the exclusively positive role of EI at work, despite the fact that past research suggested the utility of the latter in organizational behavior studies. I specified four rationales and two contingencies that can inform the behavior of individuals high in EI as to what kind of strategy they pursue in emotionally commodifying organizations. Following Turner's (1988) observation that scholars often apologize for a biased neglect of the individuals' effect on organizations and society, I proposed that EI may be a worthy construct to consider. Applying Schein's (1968) response categories to organizational socialization processes, I proposed that individuals high in EI are unlikely to emerge as organizational conformists based on the rationales discussed, and that their decision as to whether to engage in resistance (i.e., rejecting the organizational norm of commodified emotions) or creative individualism (i.e., the ability to selectively accept or reject organizational norms) is strongly contingent on their perceived alternatives and goals. To recapitulate, the perception of alternatives and individual goals appear paramount in determining the resultant behavioral choices individuals perform. This fits closely with Turner's argument that individual behavior plays an important role in the "maintenance, modification or disruption of society" (p. 1) and, by extension, organizations as well. In so doing, I expanded influential previous debates that identified and documented the commodification of emotions at work and its relation to the construct of EI (e.g., Fineman, 2000).

Based on this analysis, it is now apparent that scholars need to be much more appreciative of the potential conflict between these two research strands. In other words, future research should take into account *simultaneously* the notion of emotional convergence, as encapsulated under the umbrella of commodified emotions, and the notion of emotional divergence, as represented by the EI construct. In terms of the former, I expressed concern about the increasing similarity between organizational standards and norms in terms of their implications as control mechanism to serve organizational interests. As to the latter, I outlined several rationales and contingencies concerning the potential of individuals high in EI as nonconformist. The analysis is synthesized in Figures 1a and 1b.

Specifically, Figure 1a emphasizes the convergent consequences of normalized and commodified emotions and how such tendency constitutes a considerable contrast with the evolutionary significance of emotions. Solomon (2003) argues along similar lines when he criticizes the reduction of emotional behavior through the development of stereotypical responses, a tendency he regards as "pathological" (p. 13). Eventually, this convergence may render Toynbee's caution perhaps more realistic for organizations. As discussed above, high turnover and absence from work due to ill health may serve as a proxy measure thereof. This could also lead to organizations experiencing recruitment problems in the long run, for the way they treat employees is increasingly seen as "toxic" (Lawrence, 2008). Hence, I suggest that the commodification of emotions at work can create fertile soil for organizational inertia or demise—the moment individuals feel and realize the consequences thereof. It would be intriguing to examine the tipping point where economic advantages of commodified emotions are equalized, perhaps surpassed, by the economic disadvantages associated with absenteeism, high turnover, and recruitment problems.

At this juncture, it is pivotal to revert back to the introduction, and explicate why I deem some social norms dysfunctional, despite some scholars suggesting that any human group can only exist due to the conformity to certain norms (Forgas, 1985). On a more generic level, the dysfunction of social norms is evident in the seminal experiment by Asch (1956), who aimed at demonstrating the dynamics of conformity in groups. He documented that norms compel individuals toward group conformity, even though in the simple experiment task, individuals determined the correct answer. Hence, to avoid being visibly different, many individuals succumbed to the conformity pressure to agree with the patently incorrect group consensus. A subsequent analysis of this experiment by Scheff (1990) associates Asch's findings with the underlying emotional mechanisms. He maintains that the response occasioning the conformity was induced by shame, such that "the fear that they were suffering from a defect and that the study would disclose this defect"

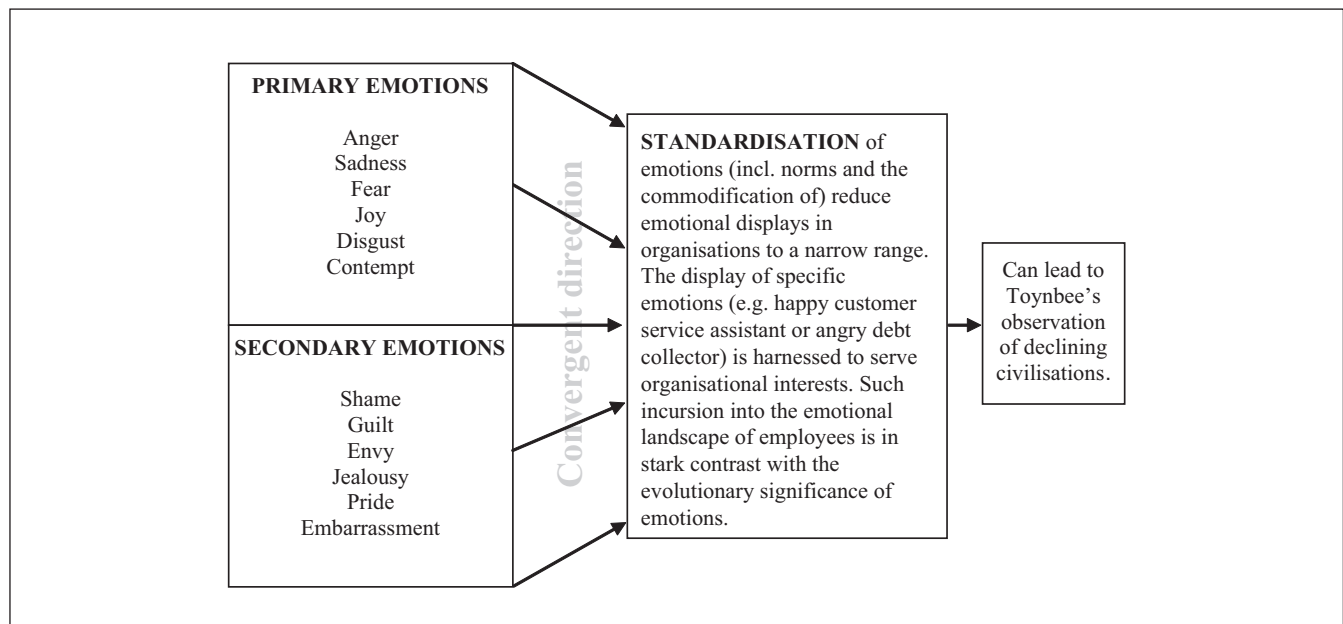


Figure 1a. Emotional convergence

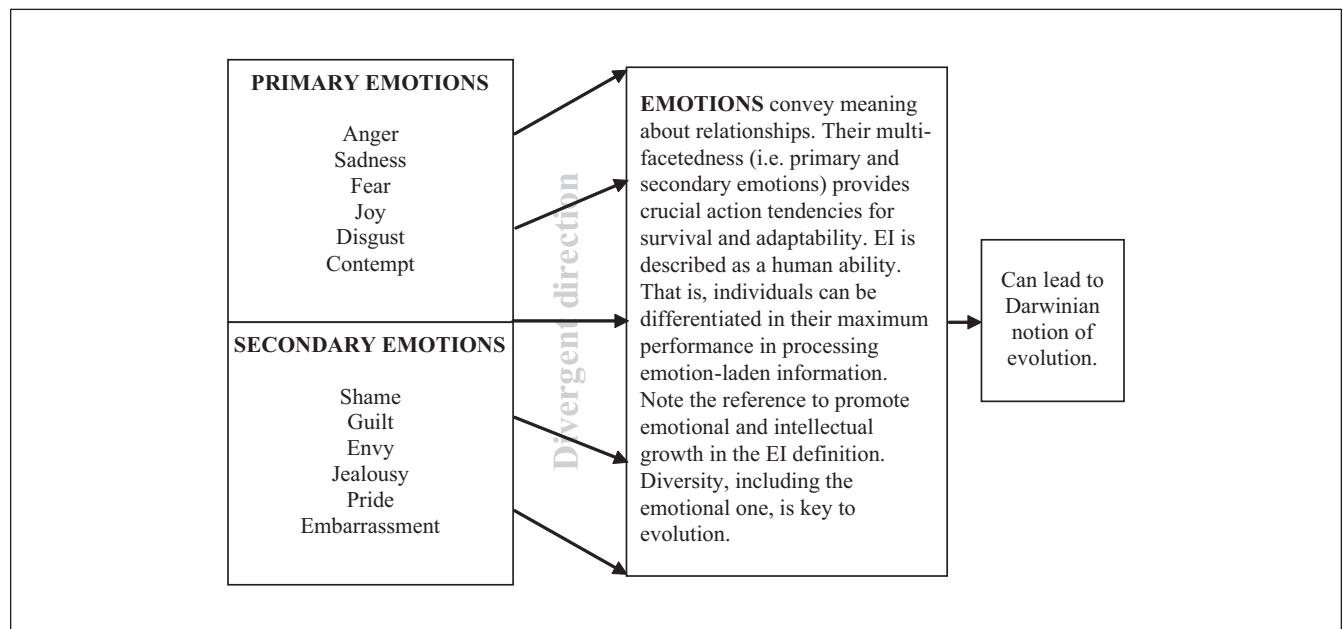


Figure 1b. Emotional divergence

Note: Figures 1a and 1b are based on Damasio (2000), Ekman (1992), Mayer, Roberts, and Barsade (2008), Schwarz and Clore (1983), and Toynbee (1951).

(p. 90). On a grander scale, Janis's (1982) groupthink phenomenon illustrates the disastrous consequences of these conformity pressures in group decision-making examples.

Whereas shame and fear do serve important functions (Solomon, 1993), in extreme forms they also play a vital role in the process of social ostracism. Specifically, individuals resisting organizational socialization rituals are sometimes

subject to certain disengagement power tactics; they are ignored or ostracized as nonconformists by colleagues or more senior members of staff wishing to enforce compliance (Williams & Sommer, 1997). Consider, for example, the case of a young lawyer, who renewed his drinking habit after being ostracized by colleagues for stopping it. Realizing the detrimental consequences of such a habit, he eventually resigned and became a teacher (Frith, 2006).

Figure 1b, by comparison, highlights the divergent and adaptive characteristics of emotions, which provide vital action tendencies for individuals. Campbell-Sills, Barlow, Brown, and Hofmann (2006) agree, noting that the pursuit of meaningful life goals involves tolerance and regulation of a wide range of emotional states.

The potent value of Figures 1a and 1b manifests itself if one superimposes on the other. The convergent direction of the former and the divergent one of the latter stresses the potential conflict between both research strands. This analysis has elicited the often-overlooked issue in EI studies that emotional and intellectual growth may not be synonymous with social or organizational growth and interests. In their original conception of EI, Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey (1999) focus on internal emotions that are crucial for the individual as opposed to social growth. Therefore, the tapping into intrapsychic experiences and the configuration of mental processes may entail that individuals realize the detrimental ramifications of social conformity pressures, and undertake measures to safeguard their well-being (Lindebaum, 2009). My concern regarding the dysfunction of some social norms directly relates to this, and it has been a central tenet in this analysis that the emotionally intelligent individual is perhaps less susceptible to social conformity pressures at work. Under this formulation, positive deviance emanates from the individual with a view to safeguarding his or her well-being, whereas negative deviance would be perceived by organizations, as individuals reject the prevailing norms that aim to serve organizational interests. Paradoxically, the perceived negative deviance from organizational norms may not be as negative as it might appear on the surface. Throughout, I have emphasized the central role of diversity in the evolution of human life. Therefore, deviance from dysfunctional norms not only can safeguard the well-being of individuals but also renders an invaluable service to organizations and society. One is reminded of Camus's (1953/2000) argument that characterizes rebellion as a real act of creation. In *The Rebel*, he posits that creation and revolution concern, in fact, only one issue: "the renaissance of civilization" (p. 237). Hence, "I rebel, therefore we exist" (p. 28). Camus's argument can be translated into the organizational arena by way of the following example. As stated earlier, recruitment problems and high turnover may be signs of deeper organizational problems resulting from the commodification of emotions. High turnover is particularly problematic in service industries, where

poor well-being oftentimes has strong bearing on intentions to quit (Kumar Mishra & Bhatnagar, 2010). The need to address these problems may then result in organizational practices of commodifying emotions being abandoned in favor of other forms of managerial practice.

It can be deduced from the above discussion that there is a curvilinear relationship between social/organizational norms and (a) the extent to which they facilitate interpersonal relationships that can serve organizational *and* individual interests and (b) the extent of the tipping point where organizational interests may be in peril as high EI individuals seek to safeguard their well-being.

I suggest that high EI may account for the tipping point in the relationship. If we consider a continuum of minor acts of emotional commodification at work (i.e., occasional acts of feigning emotions to portray politeness to colleagues or customers) to more substantive cases of commodified emotions (see Heuven & Bakker, 2003), I propose that the tipping point is situated at the juncture where individuals cannot exercise their creative individualism anymore. Beyond this, the realization that their well-being would be compromised if being pushed further upward the continuum may further fuel their desire to resist the commodification of emotion—with all its negative health consequences—and potentially leave the organization. It shall be understood therefore, that Figure 2 applies to individuals with high EI, and not low. Individuals less emotionally intelligent tend to be poorer at perceiving situational and emotional cues and can only draw on limited knowledge structures to guide their behavior (see Joseph & Newman, 2010). Hence, they may not be able to perceive the tipping point in time to prevent deteriorating well-being.

In a very real sense, the above tipping point represents a direct link to what has been called positive deviance, that is, departing from the norms of a given referent group in honorable ways (Spreitzer & Sonenshein, 2004)—honorable, however, in the sense of being positive for the individual (i.e., safeguarding one's well-being), not for the organization in the short run. As suggested previously, absenteeism and high turnover may be symptoms of organizational decline or inertia. In linking the content of Figures 1a and 1b with Figure 2, I suggest that the instance where the convergent tendency changes into the divergent one may be situated around the tipping point illustrated in Figure 2.

One would be, however, mistaken to accept the proposition of high EI individuals as nonconformists a priori. As theoretically pure and laudable such contemplation may appear, it shall be understood that individuals who, in many organizational contexts, openly express their emotions, face an overwhelmingly intricate problem; expressing a truly felt emotion at work is a delicate act—it can help sustain or destabilize the social order (Fineman, 2001). In this respect, Goffman (1963) cogently notes that "to be awkward or unkempt, to talk or move wrongly, is to be a dangerous

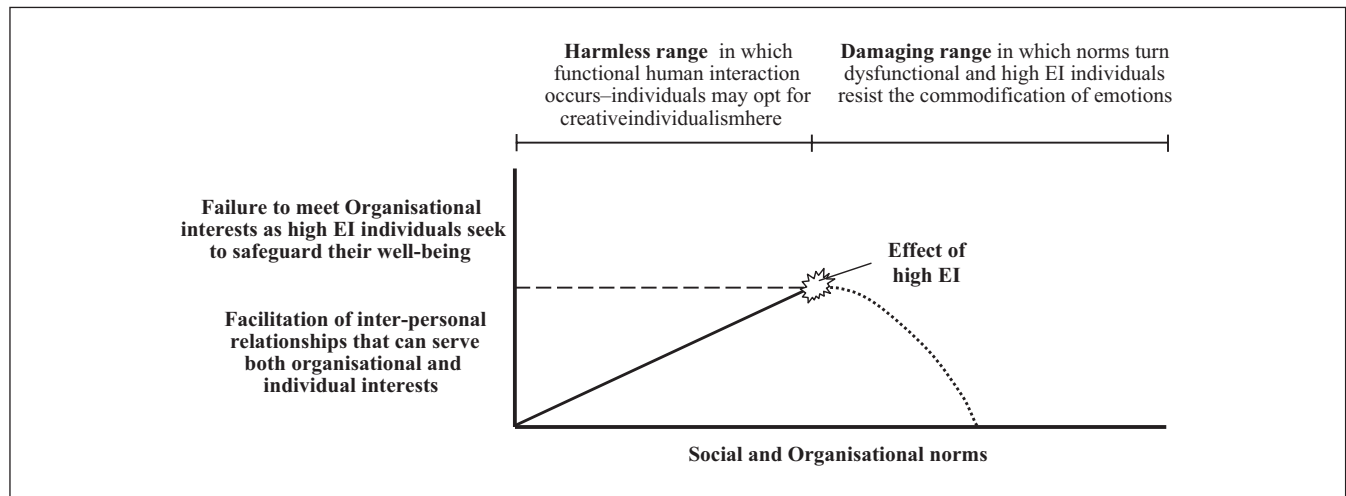


Figure 2. Curvilinear relationship between social norms and extent to which they facilitate or compromise organizational interests

giant, a destroyer of worlds” (p. 81). Hence, being conspicuously different can be a chancy undertaking. Yet, despite the earlier argument concerning individual benefits of not suppressing emotions, the roles of social actors often prescribe it, especially when they are in the lower echelons of the organization. Ogbonna and Harris’s (2004) study on work intensification and emotional labor among U.K. university lecturers firmly underlines this point. In there, several lecturers bemoaned the imposition of undue administrative strain from more senior academics. In addition, they suggest that it is often seen as an act of professionalism when individuals are able to maintain an organizationally appropriate emotional display (see also Stormer & Devine, 2008).

Future Directions

Having laid some theoretical groundwork, I propose several avenues for future research that could be incorporated in a rigorously designed longitudinal mixed-method study. First, I deem it intriguing to empirically test the curvilinear relationship highlighted in Figure 2. Of late, curvilinear relationships have been identified as a priority area for future EI research (Jordan, Dasborough, Daus, & Ashkanasy, 2010). However, Jordan and colleagues theorize around EI (or particular branches of it) predicting outcome variables in a curvilinear fashion. I propose an extension to this thinking, namely, the consideration of curvilinear effects between different levels of analysis in management research. Multilevel analyses are a thriving component in this domain, especially for emotion researchers (Ashkanasy, 2003; Averill, 1992). However, rarely have the interstices of different levels of analysis been systematically examined. For instance, to

center on individual emotion and organizational norms and their delicate interaction might reveal the interaction effect depicted in Figure 2. This constitutes an appropriate analogy to Scheff’s (1983) remark that what is human about human behavior oftentimes resided in the interaction between the inner and outer. Specifically, it is germane to empirically test whether high EI enables individuals to engage in creative individualism, so that individual and organizational goals can be facilitated, before individuals seek to safeguard their well-being. As elaborated earlier, this is the point when organizational interests may potentially be compromised due to high turnover and absenteeism. Research has shown that emotional well-being correlates negatively with turnover intentions (Kumar Mishra & Bhatnagar, 2010). In this respect, note that the current prevalent operationalization of ability EI in the form of the Mayer–Salovey–Caruso–Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT; Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2002) would appear unsuitable to empirically test the central thesis of this article. That is, can high EI be a catalyst for nonconformist behavior and make individuals leave or shun certain organizations in the first place? Underlying this is its susceptibility to measure social conformity (Matthews, Roberts, & Zeidner, 2004). To examine this thesis, future research could explore the utility of a recently developed ability EI measure (Blickle et al., 2009), which is based on target individuals’ responses to determine the correct answer of a test item. Precisely put, the correct answer is determined when the test taker selects the response actually reported by the target individual. The EI measure used would need to be coupled with measures of emotional labor, resistance tendencies, and well-being to fully address the proposition highlighted, bearing a curvilinear as opposed to linear effect in mind.

Furthermore, the issue of emotional and intellectual growth is inextricably relative in nature, as there are enduring individual differences in emotion abilities (Ashkanasy, 2003). Therefore, the aforementioned quantitative examination would benefit from a subsequent longitudinal qualitative component, which has also been discussed as a much-needed avenue for future EI research organizations (Lindebaum & Cartwright, 2011). In so doing, the lived experiences of individuals in relation to commodified emotions at work and the meaning they append to it could be explored. The longitudinal component would also enable the observation of, and exploration of rationales for, radical career changes that stem from intolerable frustration with past employers (Young & Rodgers, 1997). To further strengthen the rigor of such a study, the analysis of data emanating from the mixed-method study could be meaningfully used to single out those individuals who may exhibit such nonconformist behavior and place them in an experimental simulation. In the end, all that questionnaires permit is the prediction of behavior (i.e., the person “would do” that), but they cannot ascertain that the predicted behavior actually occurs. Experiments are often used to counter this argument (Brackett, Rivers, Shiffman, Lerner, & Salovey, 2006). With the aid of modern technology (e.g., digital cameras to analyze propensity of emotional suppression in faces), it would be possible to document the behavior that such individuals enact.

Conclusion

Solving the theoretical issues I identified in purely theoretical terms is a poor incentive for further study. I understand that the empirical exploration of my central thesis may prove challenging, especially in terms of methodology. Yet, such circumstance should not hinder us to tackle the advancement of theory and empirical testing in this woefully underexplored research area head-on. I hope that the synthesis of this analysis, in the form of the two templates (Figures 1a and 1b) and interaction model (Figure 2), sparks a new wave of more nuanced debates concerning the commodification of emotions and EI at work. Compared with the major bulk of EI studies, deviant voices are sparse at best, especially EI’s potential for nonconformity in organizations.

Appendix

A striking and related depiction is featured in the recent movie *The Island* (2005). Although this is a fictitious example, Oatley (2009) reminds us that literary fiction reflects meaningful simulations of the mind. As such, they represent ideas that individuals “play with” to guide their behavior in everyday life. The movie’s storyline revolves around a hermetically sealed top-secret facility in which human clones are reared as living repositories for affluent clients in the real

world. If a client requires, for instance, a new liver, then the clone would have his or her liver removed. In this facility, sterility and healthy living are of paramount importance. Inhabitants of this facility are lured into the illusion that, by means of a lottery, they could be transferred to *The Island*, a paradise-like last pathogen-free location on earth. One inhabitant gets increasingly frustrated and angry about the lottery and who benefits from it (i.e., those supposedly benefiting from it are actually undergoing surgery to have their organs removed). One morning, he bangs his fist against the TV screen that displays a lottery advert. High-tech sensors pick up this “disturbance,” prompting two sensors to remind him that these disturbances are unwanted in this facility, as highlighted in the excerpt below.

- C: Sir!
 I: (*Pointing to him, as if asking “me?”*)
 C: Yeah, you. Swipe. Gandu Three Echo. You’ve been flagged for public disturbance before.
 I: Yes, I had a very small emotional outburst, Sir.
 C: Safe to say that it is over?
 I: Yes, very safe. I’m feeling much better.
 C: Well, then have a pleasant day.
 I: You, too.

Note: I = inhabitant; C = censor.

Just as the confrontation is over, a friendly computer voice reminds inhabitants of the following via loudspeaker announcement: “Remember to be polite, pleasant, and peaceful. A healthy person is a happy person.”

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Bio

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